

OUR BONNIE.

A ROMANCE, BY HERBERT OAKBURNE.

CHAPTER IV.

FATE AND FANCY.

WHEN Bonnie had overcome his surprise he turned to his companion and said quietly, "I will come with you—only—only put those things out of sight, and be good enough to inform me what I am arrested for."

"For Burglary," said the detective.

Bonnie laughed, "There must be some mistake," he said.

As they passed along the embankment who should cross their path but an old friend and schoolfellow of our hero, who, seeing the pair and recognising Bonnie, exclaimed, "Why, Douglas, old man how are you? What! are you learning the detec' business?"

"*Frank Fairmount!*" ejaculated the captive, *I am glad to see you, the fact is——*" Here he glanced at his captor and hesitated.

"This gentleman is under arrest on suspicion of being concerned in the Clapham burglary," said the detective who recognised Fairmount as a young lawyer's clerk with whom he had had previous dealings.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Frank, "you've made a blunder, Mr. Smalls, I'm sure."

"I think not, sir," returned Smalls, "the lady from whom the burglar escaped, pointed him out to a constable who in his turn pointed him out to me. If the lady is mistaken, that is no fault of mine; I am merely doing my duty."

"No doubt, my dear man, *you* are perfectly satisfied, but *I* am not."

And linking his arm in Bonnie's, the two walked on, while the official lagged behind and kept his eye on the accused one.

The burglary referred to was one of special interest. One night a week ago when Miss Sturge, younger daughter of John Sturge, Esq., of Padarn Lodge, Clapham, was retiring to rest she was amazed to find a man crouching behind the curtains in her dressing room. It was dark, the gas being turned low, and before she could summon courage to shriek or move, her arm was seized and a hand put over her mouth. She just caught sight of the man's face and then felt him wrench away the diamond bracelet she wore on her right wrist. She saw him disappear through the window, and then called for help and fainted.

"Now," said Frank, as the story was told, "how can a woman recognise a man in the dark, or at least in the dim light of a little flame of gas? pooh! it's impossible."

"I wish," said Bonnie, "that I could see her and speak to her, it is very provoking that——."

"Here, I say, Smalls!" shouted Frank, turning suddenly round, "take us to this Miss, Madam, or whatever her name is, it's not fair to arrest my friend considering he isn't capable of doing such a desperate deed; besides why didn't he leave the country?"

After two minutes' deliberation the detective agreed to accompany them to Clapham, and Frank forthwith called a cab to convey them in that direction.

Padarn Lodge had a charming situation in the Balham Road.

When the trio presented themselves in the hall and asked to see Miss Sturge they were politely informed that she was not at home, but Mr. Sturge, who received them requested Bonnie to call again the next day with Mr. Smalls, when the matter could be talked over.

"But is my friend to be considered a prisoner during that time," put in Frank impulsively, "for if so I shall stay with him."

"I've no doubt he will receive every attention," replied the other.

And so after sundry protests and soft imprecations on the part of Frank, it was decided to defer seeing Miss Sturge until the morning.

It was about noon next day when they called, this time without Frank. After waiting a few minutes a rustle was heard and the door opened. Bonnie looked up and at once recognised the woman he had seen in the Abbey. It was the same face. She could not be more than seventeen, he thought. So young! She was dressed in simple black, with pointed lace and silver ornaments. Her hair, which was of a dusky golden hue, clustered round her head and forehead in careless beauty, her face, which was handsome and peaceful, lent sweet expression to the becoming softness of her blue eyes. She stood before him and he felt awed at her presence. Instinctively he rose, and faltered out, "Pardon me, Madam, but I cannot help thinking that I am the victim of a mistake. I beg you to reverse your opinion." She looked at him for a few seconds, and then sitting down motioned him to remain seated. "I felt sure," she began, "that you were the man, but why, I don't know."

He leaned forward curiously as she stated her doubt.

"You see," she continued, quite confidently, "it was rather dark at the time—I suppose you know about it?" Why didn't she say at once if she believed him to be guilty?

"I have heard the facts of the case," he replied, "but of course I have no personal recollection, because I am not guilty of the act you have caused me to be arrested for; in proof of which I can refer you to several persons who saw me elsewhere when the burglary was committed; but you are assured that I am not like the man you saw?"

"There is the difficulty," she still continued, "I don't think you are, and yet I fancied so in the Abbey. Perhaps, Mr. Smalls," turning to the detective, "I had better release this gentleman?"

"Certainly, Miss, if you are sure he is not the man."

"Ye-es, well of course he *cannot* be."

"He will not like to remain under suspicion," put in Bonnie.

She looked at him rather scornfully, and then softening her tone said, "I am sorry to have inconvenienced you, sir; I am evidently mistaken and must apologize." She turned her eyes away, for he was gazing most earnestly at her How was it? Had Fate intended them to meet so? Looking strangely pale he rose and offered her his card, and also a paper on which he had written the addresses of some of his Rusleton friends. These she gracefully accepted and then bid her visitors good morning.

"Well," said her father when he returned from the city. She knew what the 'Well' meant and replied, "He is nothing like the man; I can't think how it happened that I should fancy it, and what do you think, papa? his name is Douglas, and he has friends in Rusleton where Emilie's friend, Mrs. Douglas, lives, you know."

John Sturge merely gave a grunt from behind his newspaper and said, "Better send him an invitation to dinner next week, if he's good enough."

Such was the story of Bonnie's arrest for burglary. Miss Sturge applied to me as one of the referees, and I received the plain unvarnished tale as I have told it you, from Frank Fairmount himself who shortly afterwards came to Rusleton to occupy the position of head clerk to Jonas Wormage, an appointment he had long expected. And so commenced my means of communication with my hero, and so I am able to lead the reader through a labyrinth of circumstances which whilst they serve to interest the curious, add point by point to the romance already foreshadowed in the life of Boniface Douglas.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH WE PAUSE AND SURVEY THE SCENE.

Acquaintance may grow into friendship, friendship may ripen into love, and love produce indifference, hate, lifelong friendship, or the lifelong period termed matrimony. The reader has seen our hero and some of his friends. Doubtless the sight has not failed to produce a feeling of interest in, as well as perhaps a slight aversion to, his proceedings. In his character may be discerned wavering of purpose and unformed desire. Youth, like wine and whisky, requires keeping. The physician of experience and long practice is always esteemed wiser than the medical student. Do not, then murmur at, or misjudge the minor mind which looks to beauty and the present age for satisfaction and expression of feeling, and only in a few serious moments glances at what is solid and future. *Experientia docet!* Every ocean ripple helps to swell the mighty tide.

I must ask my reader to follow me over another period of several months, during which time young Douglas had acquired considerable experience in the great city of London. He had also become familiar with a certain family residing near Clapham, a fact which even his silence did not keep from me. With Frank Fairmount, now a resident at Rusleton, I had many a conversation respecting my old friend. Ah, Frank, little did you think when you let fall your notions concerning his ideas of life that you added link by link to this romance. Frank was impulsive by nature, and now and then he would

drop a word or two which when connected with others similar, proved of great weight and importance to my ready understanding. When you, Frank, spoke of Miss Nellie Lorrimer being a "sweet little damsel," why did you not add that you were desperately in love with her? And when you made an appointment with me, why did you not keep it instead of strolling along in the moonlight with a young lady? Sad, indeed, are the ways of some persons when those they profess to love are absent. Had I had an inkling of the matter as it stood then, I could have taken steps to prevent further flirtations. No wonder that Bonnie—poor lad!—did not receive so many letters as formerly! No wonder that, in reply to Frank's epistles wherein he occasionally inserted a paragraph in praise of "the prettiest girl he'd ever known," Bonnie should caution him as to what he did, and then forget to write back. And all that I ever heard from him himself during this interval were accounts of the movements of city life, the progress of business or study, the dinings-out and evening visits. Unsuspicious I! Wrapped up in my local vocation, what wonder that I should neglect to understand what was afar off, and only consider what reached me at hand! And Nellie! I never saw her but once up to this time, and that was one bright moonlight night just by the stile, in the road that led to my home. Frank was helping her over, but he did not see me as I hurried by. And the people of Rusleton talked as people do talk, but I held my peace and thought the more.

I often looked over to the Berrington's pew as they sat in church, and caught a glimpse of Miss Ethel with her pale face and noble bearing, and wondered what there was in her that Bonnie did not like. Possibly, however, thought I, there is some superior attraction elsewhere. And then the thought dawned upon me could it be Miss Helen Lorrimer No but Frank And then I guessed why the two seldom wrote to each other, and silently and carefully I worked out the wonderful problem, but said nothing. Thank heaven, said I to myself, as I poured out my cup of tea, thank heaven that I was meant for a bachelor! Dear, dear, how is it young people will fall in love with each other?

I also wondered if Mrs. Douglas repented yet of her stroke of policy, but, up to now, had no cognizance of the doings of Mr. Wormage. She, poor lady, was very ill just at this time, and naturally I felt anxious for my friend, her nephew. It was in the early summer—several months, as I said, having elapsed since the events recorded in my last chapter—I was sitting at my window enjoying a quiet pipe, when the servant entered and handed me a telegram. It was from Bonnie. "Am just off with a yachting party round the coast. Contrive to meet me on Friday or Saturday. Will wire you whereabouts." Humph! Yachting party! No one I know, I suppose. Why does he want to see me? Some little freak I expect. Rusleton was within three hours distance from the Welsh Coast, and I immediately commenced speculating where the meeting was to take place. This was Monday. There were, therefore, three clear days, so I should be able to arrange matters. On the Friday afternoon a telegram arrived. "Shall land at B—— to-night and stay over Sunday at C—— Hotel."

. . . . I reached B—— by 10 o'clock next day, and Bonnie met me at the station. "We shall have lunch with the Sturges," he said, "the people, you know, who wrote to you once. The yacht belongs to Mr. Sturge's nephew, and there are only five of us in the party." "Miss Sturge, of course," I queried. "Yes, and her cousins, You will like young Sturge. A regular fish. By the way, do you hear anything of the Sturges at Rusleton. Lil— Miss Sturge has a sister who knows the place, there's some mystery about it, I can't get it out of them, but fancy they know something of me." I stared in surprise. "In what way do you mean?" said I. He coloured up. "Oh! nothing, you did not tell them anything, did you, beyond what was necessary?" "My dear fellow, of course not, what did I know? What a man you are for mysteries!"

And then he turned the subject off and remarked that B—— was a nice sort of place to stay at, and he was in no hurry to get back. And I guessed his reason when I entered their private sitting room and stood face to face with Lilian Sturge.

NOTE: "Our Bonnie" will be concluded in the October number.

H A T R E D .

A SONNET.

Monster of evil looks and words, in whom
 Lives ev'ry cold and unendearing pow'r,
 Like sunshine never, nor indeed like show'r,
 But one perpetual day of darkest gloom.
 In thy harsh glance all earthly passions loom,
 And in thy sulking eye doth temper lower,
 Base consorts of this God-made mortal bower,
 And meeter adjuncts of the cannon's boom;
 Oh, Hate! thou subtle, sinful, wicked thing,
 Thou vile and cruel master of the man,
 Thou son of darkness, death, and misery;
 Thou needest Love's most sweet and healing spring
 To stay thy savage murd'rous devil's ban,
 And change thy purpose for eternity.